

## Prof. J.E. Jayasuriya – Pioneering Educationist with a Vision by R.S. Medagama



The 92nd birth anniversary of the late Prof. J.E. Jayasuriya, the outstanding teacher educationist of modern Sri Lanka fell on the 14th of February. The J.E. Jayasuriya Memorial Foundation has organised the usual commemoration lecture at the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute to be delivered by one of his distinguished students, Mr. Ariyaratne Hewage, a former Secretary of the Ministry of Education and at present the Chairman of the Finance Commission, on Monday the 15th today. A distinguished gathering of educationists, most of

who are his past students, admirers and well wishers, will gather to pay their tribute to the late guru who has molded their characters while they were students at the university. This is a humble tribute from one of his students.

### Life Story

Born on 14th February, 1918, as son of a post-master who was on transferable service, young Jayasuriya had to accompany his parents to the stations where his father had to serve. He started his primary education at Nawalapitiya Anuruddha Vidyalaya, then joined Dharmasoka College, Ambalangoda and finally Wesley College, Colombo. In 1933, he sat the Cambridge Senior Examination and displayed his brilliance by securing the third place in order of merit among all candidates of the British Empire. In recognition of his brilliant performance. He was given a scholarship to the University College, Colombo.

As an undergraduate with his logical mind, he selected Mathematics as his field of study. In 1939, he graduated with a First Class in Mathematics at the age of 21 years.

The ambition of most young graduates those days was to enter the Ceylon Civil Service. As usual, young Jayasuriya also sat for the Civil Service Examination. While awaiting results, he agreed to accept the post of principal of the newly founded Dharmapala Vidyalaya, Pannipitiya, on the invitation of Mr. P. De. S. Kularatne, the great educationist. About one month after assuming the post of principal of Dharmapala Vidyalaya, he was called for the viva voce examination for the selection to the Civil Service. The Chairman of the interview board was Mr. L. Mc. D. Robinson, the then Director of Education who was not well disposed towards the establishment of Buddhist schools. To the question where he is working, Jayasuriya boldly stated that he is the acting principal of Dharmapala Vidyalaya. This school had not been registered by the Director of Education. That put an end to young Jayasuriya's ambition of becoming a Civil Servant. He did not repent over that, for later he wrote that had he joined the Civil Service he would have missed his mission in life.

He continued to serve the course of education in the country by serving in several schools. After Dharmapala, he accepted the post of Deputy Principal of Sri Sumangala Vidyalaya, Hikkaduwa and then he was invited by the Minister of Education Dr. C. W. W. Kannangara to take charge of the newly established central school in his electorate, the Matugama Central College. Next he joined the Wadduwa Central College. In 1947 he proceeded to London to follow his post graduate studies. At the Institute of Education of the University of London, he did the Post Graduate Diploma in Education as well as the M.A in Education.

On his return, in 1949, he accepted the post of Lecturer in Mathematics at the Government Teacher Training College, Maharagama. In 1952, he joined the Faculty of Education of the University of Ceylon as a lecturer and in 1957 he was appointed as Professor of Education. He retired from the university in 1971 to accept an assignment in UNESCO, Bangkok, as Regional Advisor in Population Education. At the end of that assignment, he returned to the country and engaged in research and publications while serving in advisory capacity in several projects, until his demise in January 1989.

Prof. Jayasuriya was a person of many parts. He was an exemplary teacher, educational administrator, author, researcher and policy maker, international consultant and a devoted family man. I wish to briefly recount these different facets of his life within the limitations of a newspaper article.

### Exemplary Teacher

Prof. Jayasuriya was a born teacher with all the characteristics of an exemplary model of a pedagogue. He was very soft spoken, but distinct and clear, well versed in the subject matter and effective in delivering concepts. He never dictated lecture notes but at the end his students found that they understood well all the concepts that he wanted to convey. At times he looked like a typical school master when he surveyed the whole class to draw the attention of everyone. His lessons were interspersed with questions, anecdotes, jokes and remarks which made them very interesting. And this is when he was teaching one of the most difficult subjects, Educational Psychology and Measurement.

I remember how he organised a seminar with a group of principals from Kandy on a Saturday when he wanted to deal with the subject of "Education for National Integration". The following week in the class he had a discussion summarising all the points that emerged at the seminar with his critical comments.

He firmly believed that the school should be closely linked with the community. Instead of theorising on the subject, he related his experiences as a principal in the early part of his career. He recapped how he visited homes of benefactors with Mr. P. De. S. Kularathne and spent quite a long time talking on extraneous matters and came to the purpose of the visit, soliciting donations to the school, after quite some time. That strategy succeeded.

A good teacher is always a good learner. During our Diploma in Education course we had an American, Prof. Mervin D Glock from Cornell University teaching Educational Psychology and Measurement. Prof. Glock was a teacher well versed in his subject and Prof. Jayasuriya used to attend all these lectures and sit in the classroom without fail. The other Faculty members too, followed him. Some students found it difficult to follow the American accent of Prof. Glock at the beginning, and Prof. Jayasuriya offered to assist them after the class.

### Educational Administrator

Prof. Jayasuriya started his career as an educational administrator being the first principal of Dharmapala Vidyalaya, Pannipitiya. One would wonder how a raw graduate, at the age of 21, without any experience could manage a school with experienced senior teachers. The fact that he laid the foundation for the establishment of a very successful public school, as acknowledged by

persons who were his students at that time, is testimony to his organisational abilities. It is in recognition of his abilities that Dr.C.W.W. Kannangara invited him to be in charge of the central school established in the minister's electorate.

As professor in charge of the Faculty of Education at the Peradeniya University for 15 years, he developed it to be a one of the best faculties of education. He encouraged many promising students to continue with their post graduate studies and guided them. He recruited the best of them to the Faculty so that their services would be available to generations of future students.

Since its inception the Faculty of Education provided the Diploma in Education course for teachers released by the Department of Education. There were of course a few postgraduate students. Professor Jayasuriya felt the need for organising a Bachelor of Education course at undergraduate level. After long deliberation and detailed planning he launched the B.Ed. course which was an instant success. Some of the best undergraduates offered to take up this course and the products have performed brilliantly in their careers. It is unfortunate that this was given up later.

He taught us Educational Administration, but did not delve much into theories of administration. Presenting practical examples he inculcated the skills necessary for an administrator. He taught participatory management by discussing how the parent-teacher association of a school should be organised with a network of committees. An incident that took place during our time illustrates what a tactful manager he was. At the end of every term there was a social organised by the students' committee. The chairman of the committee was an inspector of schools who was authoritarian in his ways. The vice chair-person was a senior lady teacher from a leading girls' school. While arranging the hall the chairman has asked the lady to carry some flower pots to the hall. The lady got offended and complained to Prof. Jayasuriya. The professor listened to her and after a pause smilingly said "Mrs. ....can I do it for you". The lady herself could not help laughing!

Author

While being a university teacher he found the time to write books necessary for the use of his students. Statistics was a difficult subject for most students he wrote a book "Statistical Calculations to Teachers" which became a handbook for every student of educational measurement.

When the medium of instruction in schools was changed to national languages, lack of textbooks in Sinhala was a serious problem. In particular there was no book in Mathematics. In order to meet this need he wrote three series of books on Arithmetic, Algebra and Geometry from Grade six to the G.C.E (O.L) standard. These books were interesting to the students as mathematical concepts were introduced through exercises with practical work and helped many a student to get through their O. Levels. These remained the most widely used books in schools until the government started to produce books for free distribution. He has also written a Primer and Grade 1 Reader for the Kindergarten classes named as Senarath Readers.

Besides he also wrote a number of books on education in general which are useful for students of education as well as the general reader interested in education. "Some Issues in Ceylon Education" is his critical reaction to the distortion of his recommendations of the National Education Commission Report (1962) in the Government Whitepaper of 1964. "Education in Ceylon - Before and After Independence" (1969) is a critical review of the education policies of the government. "Education in Korea – A Third World Success story" is an analysis of the Korean education system

and its lessons for other developing countries in Asia. "The Dynamics of Nation Building in Malaysia" is a similar analysis of the Malaysian education system. "Education in the Third world – Some Reflections" highlighted the need to deviate from the western education models and how Sri Lanka has lost its direction in education policy.

#### Researcher

Prof. Jayasuriya has published over 150 Research papers on various aspects of education. What is amazing is the multiplicity of areas that has been covered in these researches. Child psychology, teaching of mathematics, nursery education, teaching English language, intelligence testing, teaching science, sociology of education, vocational guidance, problems of children in slums, child delinquency, maintenance of cumulative records, role of schools in promoting national unity, project method in learning, pirivena universities, adult education, problems of adolescents, mentally handicapped children, examinations and testing, population education are some of the topics on which research papers have been published in prestigious journals.

He also did some pioneering work in introducing intelligence testing The National Education Society Intelligence Test, which he helped to develop was the only standardised test available for teachers those days in national languages. He also adapted the Raven's Non- verbal test to Sri Lankan standards.

#### Policy maker

His contribution to the field of policy formulation in education is outstanding. After the take over of assisted schools in 1960 there was a need to formulate a national policy on education. The government appointed a National Education Commission and the obvious choice for the position of chairman was none other than Prof. Jayasuriya. With a team of members who held divergent views on education and varied interests it would have been an impossible task to reach a consensus on many matters. However Prof. Jayasuriya's able guidance and leadership made it possible to come out with some far-reaching proposals for a national system of education.

Recommendations of the Commission based on the Terms of Reference covered a wide range of topics, but the key recommendations, if implemented would have laid the foundation for a national system of education for a developing country like Sri Lanka. Some examples are the re-organisation of schools, admission of pupils to schools, vocational education, adult education, work experience, empowerment of schools, community relations and guidance and counselling.

However the governments' failure to implement the proposals of the National Education Commission made him disillusioned with the educational establishment.

#### International Consultant

He retired from the university prematurely to take up an assignment as the Regional Advisor in Population Education at UNESCO, Bangkok and worked there for five years. He headed a team of specialists to help the countries of the region to forge ahead with this novel program which faced deep rooted resistance. Prof. Jayasuriya developed and published a Source Book on Population Education in Asia which was widely distributed in the region and was critically influential in the evolution of the concepts and programming practices of population education. He with his colleagues launched programming missions in the countries in the region which led to the

establishment of population education projects. He was also responsible for setting up a clearing house of publications on population education at UNESCO Office to which he himself authored many articles.

Besides he made use of his stay in Bangkok to study the education systems in the countries in the region. His view was that lessons we can learn from the experience of the newly developing countries were more relevant to the third world countries. He undertook a series of studies on educational change and he could complete only two, those of Malaysia and the Republic of Korea.

One of his colleagues Dr. Rajah Roy Singh who served as Assistant Director General, UNESCO, Bangkok, paying a tribute in memory of the late professor describes Prof. Jayasuriya as a man ahead of his times. Certainly he was a man with a vision for the future. He firmly believed that quality education can be provided while ensuring equity.

*(The writer is a retired Director of Education who subsequently functioned as Secretary to the National Education Commission, Director General Education Reforms of the Ministry of Education and Advisor).*